

Masthead Logo

**The Iowa Review**

---

Volume 12

Issue 2 Spring-Summer: *Extended Outlooks: The Iowa  
Review Collection of Contemporary Writing by Women*

---

Article 76

1981

# Key West (Triple Ballade with Enjambed Refrain, Plus Envoy)

Judith Moffett

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview>

Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Moffett, Judith. "Key West (Triple Ballade with Enjambed Refrain, Plus Envoy)." *The Iowa Review* 12.2 (1981): 246-249. Web.  
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.2745>

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Iowa Review by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact [lib-ir@uiowa.edu](mailto:lib-ir@uiowa.edu).

# Key West (Triple Ballade with Enjambed Refrain, plus Envoy) · *Judith Moffett*

*for David Jackson*

The garden's shading. Let there be  
Tea in the deck-and-louvre tent  
Begun, degree by slow degree,  
Upon its languid, smooth descent  
Toward eighty. Rose and succulent  
Look up from blooming peatbeds thick  
With strangeness, lush, ebullient  
Displayed against white-sand-and-brick

Paving. From frond to shrub to tree  
(So *that's* what Orphan Annie meant!)  
Lizards are leaping — skittery,  
Dirt-colored, slim, belligerent,  
Each furnished with a prominent  
Accessory featured in their shtick,  
Unvocal, yet grandiloquent  
Displayed against white sand and brick.

Say X has accidentally  
Invaded turf big Z has spent  
His little life defending; Z  
Does jerky push-ups, does Present-  
Throat-flat (inflated? through a vent?),  
Out-in, out-in, erotic tic  
Of warning — Pounce! and *skitter* went  
Displayed-Against. White sand and brick

Are not much less intelligent,  
Frankly. They'll "flap" a leaf or stick,  
Bright membrane flashing Go! Repent!  
Displayed against white sand and brick.

The reptile brain is cold and small,  
No space, no need for judgment there.  
Watch. In the deepest Turtle Kraal  
A monstrous head pokes up for air,  
Lairpet of Grendel's, chased from lair  
To scare up dinner. Jaws of dread  
Gasp open. Eyes of earthenware  
Identify. The loggerhead

Lunges on cue; the guide will trawl  
A chunk of rotten lobster where  
He'll strike. Abruptly I recall  
The moth aflutter on the bare  
Floorboards, the little lizard's stare,  
Fixed, from the threshold, how it sped  
Across the varnish . . . yes. Compare?  
Identify? the loggerhead

Who wallows, tries to climb the wall,  
Whose ton of crushing-power can tear  
A man in chunks and eat him all,  
Whose fins thrash up the mal de mer,  
Who now, with all that force to spare,  
Crushes the bait and sinks like lead.  
A blond child shrieks. These kinds of scare  
Identify the loggerhead

And lizard with its charming flare  
Round as a flannel tongue and red.  
Look long, think well before you dare  
Identify the loggerhead.

A green iguana spined with plates  
Blinks at the tourist with a ques-  
Tion not these flattened welterweights':  
Where are the dinosaurs of yes-  
Ter-Age? New Zealand and Loch Ness,  
Pygmy Iguanodon, poor thing.  
That clockwork, kneejerk, passionless  
Instinct persists, but Reason's king.

It's Sophosaurus rex who baits  
The sea-troll Instinct now. I guess  
I'm glad—though how he tolerates  
That filthy pool—! (As Freud would stress,  
Whatever dragon we repress  
Befouls its prison.) Evening  
Brings us to ours, we both undress,  
Instinct persists . . . but Reason's king

Here where a white bar melts, and spates  
Of filtered water effervesce,  
Pure azure balm that liquidates  
Disturbing thoughts, the turtle mess,  
The saurian heat, the— S.O.S.?  
Again? This same dumb lizardling  
Keeps trying, with the same success—  
Instinct persists (but Reason's king

Or else)—to scale the tiles. Noblesse  
Oblige, a royal palm's frayed wing  
Retrieves him from a giantess.  
Instinct persists but Reason's king.

These trinkets, David — waterslick  
Pool tiling, tiny splayfeet spread  
On surface tension (rhetoric?),  
Sea monster in his muckbath fed  
On rot, display in tropicbed —  
All thanks to you. The length of string  
They're threaded on is only thread:  
Instinct-persists-but-Reason's-king.